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# Environmental Quality Incentives Program

## 2007 Program and Policies for Minnesota

### Background

The Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) was reauthorized in the Farm Security and Rural Investment Act of 2002. Originally authorized in the 1996 Farm Bill, EQIP provides technical assistance, cost-share payments, and incentive payments to assist crop, livestock, and other agricultural producers with environmental and conservation improvements to their operations.

### Minnesota Program Objectives:

Support the National Program Objectives and National Priorities.

Promote assistance to producers that addresses existing problems in protecting soil, water, air, and related resources.

Promote policies that encourage the implementation of cost-effective conservation practices.

Provide a state program that facilitates local input and priorities in developing contracts.

Provide a state program that results in efficient administration, timely decisions, quality contracts and sound conservation on the land.

Provide assistance to underserved individuals and groups, including American Indian Tribes/individuals, limited resource producers, and other locally identified groups.

### 2007 MN EQIP Allocations

MN EQIP funds will be allocated through the 91 Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) boundaries. Each NRCS field office used its SWCD and Local Work Group to develop a local EQIP program and determine local priorities. Each local program description and ranking worksheet can be viewed in the SWCD Guidelines page. EQIP applications will be scored, ranked, and funded at the local level based on the local priorities and the local allocation. Each office may also develop funding pools to target funds to specific land uses or issues, including pools set aside for Comprehensive Nutrient Management Plans or prescribed grazing systems.

For 2007 MN will have state-wide emphasis funds for American Indians and New Immigrant Farmers. MN will also provide special funding for Drought Assistance, the Whitewater Watershed, and the Kanaranzi-Little Rock Watershed (K-LR Watershed).

For 2007 MN received Ground and Surface Water Conservation (GSWC) EQIP funds. The purpose of these funds is to promote ground and surface water conservation by providing cost-share and incentive payments to improve irrigation systems, enhance irrigation efficiencies, convert to less water-intensive agriculture, improve water storage through groundwater recharge, mitigate drought effects, or other water conservation methods.

A participant receives GSWC funds only if it facilitates a net savings in water resources for the producer. Participants must meet the requirement of the land being irrigated 2 out of the

last 5 years. Because of the limited funding, MN will set a highest priority threshold for applications using the Practice Standard 442-Irrigation System, Sprinkler.

#### MN EQIP Conservation Practice Payment Docket.

Local, area, and state personnel and other agencies and groups developed the EQIP docket establishing statewide cost-share rates and payment methods. Counties use this docket to determine eligible practices and the cost-share available for each. Using local input, some offices may choose to remove a practice from their list of eligible local practices. In these instances the practices removed is noted in the SWCD's local program description.

#### MN EQIP Scoring Worksheet.

A template scoring worksheet was developed to assist offices in ranking their applications. The worksheet scores the 4 national EQIP priorities: soil erosion, water quality, air quality, and wildlife habitat, plus grazing, forestry, and other local concerns. In Minnesota, applications must address at least 1 of the 4 national priorities in order to be a high priority application considered for funding. An application scoring 0 in the National Issues Score will be considered a low priority application and be ineligible for funding at this time. Each locality modified the worksheet to prioritize their local resource concerns.

For more information on the Minnesota EQIP program contact:

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#### Framework for Developing a Locally-led EQIP

Each District Conservationist (DC) and Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) worked jointly to develop a local EQIP program. District EQIP allocations are provided to those districts that developed a written EQIP program detailing their local priorities, and how they will score and rank applications.

Each SWCD convened the Local Work Group to advise the NRCS on the local EQIP process including ranking criteria, local priorities, local resource concerns, and local outreach and information. The Local Work Group recommended the local program description and ranking worksheet to the DC. The Local Work Group also provided the DC with recommendations regarding practices to be deleted from the state cost-share docket.

The NRCS DC provided the local EQIP description, ranking worksheet, and any docket changes along with the Local Work Group's recommendations through their respective Area office to the State Conservationist.

The State Conservationist reviewed and approved each local EQIP program. The local program description and ranking worksheet must be available on the Internet through the Minnesota NRCS home page before any local contracts can be approved.

## Local Work Group development of local EQIP.

District FY07 EQIP

- 1. List the local resource concerns that EQIP can address:**
- 2. If applicable, list any geographic regions (i.e. watersheds, townships, etc.) and their respective resource concerns within the District to receive priority:**
- 3. From items 1 & 2 above prioritize the local resource concerns to be addressed with EQIP funding for the district. Describe a minimum of 3 categories of the highest priority applications which you would want to receive funding.**
- 4. Develop a minimum of 3 and maximum of 12 yes/no questions to determine if an application is addressing the high priority concerns described in item 3.**

5. Assign points to the questions in Item #4 as desired to reflect local priorities. The total points assigned to the questions must equal between 35-60 points.
6. Submit this worksheet to your respective ASTC(FO). After approval from the state office, the questions will be entered into the Local Issues section of the ranking tool.
7. List any recommended practices to be deleted from the state Conservation Practice Payment Document

The local EQIP program description, cost-share docket changes, and ranking worksheet must be reviewed and approved by the State Conservationist before any EQIP contract is approved and signed.

This document serves as the Local Work Group recommendation for FY 07 EQIP. Attached is a roster of participation in the Local Work Group.

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Chair, Local Work Group

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